Speech for the
Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada,
Vic Toews, Q.C.

National Victims of Crime Awareness Week
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Introduction

Thank you, [MC], for your kind introduction.

My colleague, the Honourable Stockwell Day, Minister of Public Safety, and I have the great pleasure of welcoming you today to the official opening of the first National Victims of Crime Awareness Week.

This event, which runs from April 23 to 29, is the first of its kind in Canada. The theme for this year is "People, Services, Laws: Did you know?" The goal is to let Canadians know more about victim issues and about the services and laws that are in place to help victims and their families.

Many of you here today know first-hand that crime can have a devastating effect on individuals, their families, and communities. During this first National Victims of Crime Awareness Week, we will promote the issues and concerns experienced by victims of crime, and raise awareness about their needs.

The Cost of Crime

Whenever I talk about victims issues, I am always reminded of my late colleague, Chuck Cadman. Chuck is a shining example of an ordinary person confronted by a tragic circumstance - a circumstance that opened his eyes to the issues faced by people who have been touched by crime.

In 1992, Chuck's sixteen-year-old son Jesse was murdered. This tragedy led Chuck and his wife Dona to start *Crime, Responsibility, and Youth*, a justice reform and victims advocacy group. Chuck was a passionate advocate for victim issues and, as a Member of Parliament, introduced changes to the *Criminal Code* to help victims. He wanted to make a difference for victims and their families, and he succeeded.

The new government is dedicated to targeting and preventing crime. Our commitment extends, as well, to recognizing the needs of victims and ensuring that they have a voice in the criminal justice system.

Crime hurts people in many different ways. It produces both short-term and long-term hardship, and can be a terrible burden for the victim.

In financial terms: crime in Canada costs an estimated $70 billion per year. Of that amount, 67% - or $47 billion - is shouldered by the victim. These costs include the value of damaged or stolen

property, loss of income and productivity, and health services. Another $10 billion is spent on defensive measures such as security devices and protective services. The cost to the criminal justice system - including police, courts, and correctional services - account for $13 billion dollars per year.

While the total dollar value of crime in Canada is estimated to be $70 billion per year, the personal costs of crime can never truly be measured. We cannot put a price on the fear, pain, and suffering of those who are victimized by crime.

However, when a crime occurs, it doesn't affect just one person. The entire community - family, friends, and neighbours - feels its impact. Many of us know someone who has been victimized or have been victims ourselves. So we know the psychological and emotional damage crime causes. This is why it is essential that we help to give a greater voice to victims of crime - and promote the services that are available - through events such as this first National Victims of Crime Awareness Week.

Victim Services in Canada

There are many victim service agencies throughout Canada, and each one is an important part of the support system. Women's shelters, victim-witness assistance programs, provincial victims service centres - all of these services and many others serve to support victims of crime.

The Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics' reports that there are 606 agencies with a primary mandate to assist victims of crime. And many other social services agencies offer more general help.

These agencies rely on the tireless efforts of both paid staff and volunteers. These are good people who work extremely hard to help victims of crime. They approach each case with remarkable determination and compassion, and I salute their efforts.

To put their work into perspective, in a recent survey over 400 victim services agencies reported serving approximately 360,000 victims in the year 2002-2003. Snapshot data from over 370 agencies indicated that more than 4,300 people can receive services on any given day.

But statistics only tell part of the story. We know that many victims do not seek professional support. Instead, they turn to informal sources of support, such as a friend, neighbour, or family member. Others turn to a police officer, social worker, or health care worker. These people are also an essential part of a victim's recovery. They, too, deserve our recognition and gratitude.

We also know that, while services and support are available, many victims - and Canadians in general - may not be aware of them. This is why it is critical to raise awareness of these services. We need to ensure that those in need can find support for themselves or their loved ones as soon as possible after a crime occurs, when they can derive the greatest benefit.

Most importantly, I believe that the number and range of services, and the dedication of the individuals who provide them, tell us something special about Canadian society: the value we place on helping others. Whether it is an agency worker, volunteer, neighbour or friend, it is our nature to help our fellow Canadians. Victims must know that they are not alone. All of us must play a role in helping to change attitudes, raise awareness, and meet the basic needs of victims of crime.

Programs and Laws

The Government of Canada has a responsibility to learn about victim issues, enact legislation, and develop services. Our new government is pleased to carry on with this important work on behalf of

victims.

This first National Victims of Crime Awareness Week is an opportunity to recognize our past successes, yet continue to improve our programs and legislation so that they meet the needs of victims.

Indeed, we cannot promote victim issues if we are content to simply maintain established programs and legislation. In the recent Speech from the Throne, the Governor General noted that some victims feel they often lack a voice. We must work together to strengthen their voices, listen to their concerns, and respond to them.

As an example, victims have told us that attendance at Parole Board hearings is essential but costly. Now, a new funding component to the *Victims Fund* provides financial assistance for victims to attend National Parole Board hearings.

With this additional support, more victims will be able to take the opportunity to attend the parole hearing - if they choose to do so - simply to observe or to present their victim impact statement.

The responsibility for the criminal justice system in Canada is a shared one. While the provision of victim services and assistance is primarily a provincial responsibility, our new government will work cooperatively with our provincial and territorial counterparts on important initiatives. We will do this under the *Canadian Statement of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime*, which guides the development of policies, legislation, and practices in the provinces and territories and in areas where the federal government has jurisdiction.

Since that statement was endorsed in 1988, all provinces have enacted victim legislation , such as *Victims of Crime Acts*, or a Victims' "Bill of Rights." Some provinces have legislation governing criminal injuries compensation . Provinces have also established and expanded Victim Service Divisions, both court-based and police-based. These measures set out principles for the treatment of victims by criminal justice system personnel. In some jurisdictions, services have also been established to provide victims with information and financial assistance.

At the federal level, the *Criminal Code* has been amended to enhance the role of victims and make legal proceedings easier and less traumatic. The *Corrections and Conditional Release Act* also includes provisions to inform victims about the status of offenders and other concerns.

On an ongoing basis, the Policy Centre for Victim Issues develops federal policy and legislation, implements a federal victim strategy, and helps administer programs that help victims. It also encourages greater cooperation between all levels of government and NGOs, and promotes new approaches to better serve victims. For example, the *Victims Fund* provides $2 million per year in grants and contributions to governmental and non-governmental organizations that work to improve the justice system's response to victims.

Conclusion

In closing, ladies and gentlemen, I wish to reiterate the Government of Canada's commitment to increase awareness of the concerns and issues that victims of crime face in Canada, as well as to promote the laws and services that help them.

By building on existing partnerships with provincial and territorial governments, non-governmental organizations, and stakeholders, we will continue to develop efficient and effective victim services.

National Victims of Crime Awareness Week will inform Canadians about victim support systems and help to ensure that victims have a strong voice within the Canadian justice system. By working together, I believe we can help to make this difficult process easier for those who are

most in need of our support.

I wish you all a productive and inspiring week.

Thank you.

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